



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Economic Development Commission

MEETING MINUTES

August 9, 2011 | 7:30 p.m.

Setti D. Warren
Mayor

Candace Havens
Director
Planning & Development

Amanda Stout
Senior Economic
Development Planner

Commissioners

Daphne Collins, Chair
Christopher Steele,
Vice Chair
Jack Leader, Secretary

Barry Abramson
David Abromowitz
Charles Eisenberg
Robert Gifford
Jane Ives
Peter Kai Jung Lew
Ronald Lipof
Joyce Moss
John R.A. Pears
Philip Plottel
Darryl Settles

Attendance

Commissioners: Daphne Collins (Chair), Chris Steele (Vice Chair), Jack Leader (Secretary), Barry Abramson, Charles Eisenberg, Jane Ives, Ronald Lipof, John Pears

Staff: Amanda Stout

Guests: Ald. Charlie Shapiro, Bill Renke, Anatol Zukerman

Absent: David Abromowitz, Robert Gifford, Peter Kai Jung Lew, Joyce Moss, Philip Plottel, Darryl Settles

Agenda Items

1. Strategic Business Outreach Discussion

- As a result of recent EDC meetings, discussions between Commissioners and Planning staff, and conversations with local business owners, Daphne Collins and Amanda Stout compiled and distributed a list of possible short-term projects which the EDC might take on between August and December 2011 (see "Possible Short-Term Projects" list attached).

- Collins and Steele reported on a recent conversation with Joel Kadis, property owner of the Panera in Newton Centre, a project that was approved by special permit in December 2009. They said Kadis noted a lack of predictability in the process, as well as a lack of level playing field regarding parking waivers.

- Collins and Steele would like to see the EDC learn from businesses through this type of outreach and then use this feedback to help educate the Aldermen on the concerns of business and property owners in Newton. One suggestion was to invite Aldermen, particularly one member of Land Use and one member of ZAP, to attend EDC meetings. It was noted that the EDC might serve as a listener and facilitator. The EDSAT (Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool) questions whether a municipality has a "quick response team," and some suggested that the EDC could be such a "SWAT team."

- Other ideas:

- Help the City consider what types of biotech/life sciences/green energy businesses we want to see and suggest steps to recruit them
- Talk to businesses on a village-by-village basis and help set up business associations or Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in villages
- Hold a forum to help small businesses access money (venture capital), marketing, advice, or other needs

- Address needs of existing businesses
- Bring Aldermen into the conversation
- EDC coordinate with Amanda Stout on upcoming “village visits” to business owners
- Assist with data collection and analysis
- Business attraction
- Address structural issues in zoning and government, but do not wait for these changes; start helping businesses now
- EDC write an editorial for the TAB
- Comments from guests
 - Anatol Zukerman asked what the EDC, as part of City government, has done and can do for him as a small business owner, particularly in the realm of reforming the Newton Zoning Ordinance.
 - Ald. Charlie Shapiro spoke as a member of ZAP, a Newton native, and a Newton small business owner. He observed that many Newton residents think of themselves as living in a “village” rather than a large city and that one challenge is to help steer conversations away from whether a site should be developed and towards a discussion of how a site might best be developed. He suggested that Stout include Aldermen in establishing relationships with local businesses and that the EDC invite Aldermen to meetings and work together to increase tax revenue and support businesses. He mentioned the Meals Tax and noted that we could help businesses see a long-term benefit from this.
- The discussion led to the conclusion that there are two major areas that the EDC might address in the short-term. The commission created a subcommittee for each area, created an initial list of interested members, and set the first meeting date. All commissioners are invited to attend either or both meetings.
 - ***Support Existing Businesses Subcommittee*** – Collins, Steele, Leader, Ives; first meeting on Wednesday, August 31st, 9:00 a.m.
 - ***Attract New Businesses Subcommittee*** – Steele, Abramson, Eisenberg, Lipof, Pears; first meeting on Wednesday, August 31st, 8:00 a.m.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Amanda Stout, AICP

Sr. Economic Development Planner

- Speaker series
- Annual business recognition awards
- Business school project for Spring 2012 [i.e. Babson or BC MBAs do a study; MIT planning students will be studying West Newton Fall 2011 semester]
- Art windows – Collaboration with a landlord, Newton schools art department, art associations, artist to exhibit in vacant visible storefronts [related: Amanda spoke with artists who would like a short-term lease of 2nd floor space for working studio]
- Newton business merchant card for discounts for Newton college students [note: please hold off on this for now as there is a related merchant card effort currently moving forward with the Newton Cultural Alliance and the City]
- Other efforts and advertising to encourage Newton college students (BC, BC Law, Mount Ida, Laselle) to patronize businesses in Newton
- Economic Development Website – create links to small business advice, expertise, tools, sources of capital
- Economic Development Website – create links to Newton business profiles and assist in adding profiles [Daphne and Pam Boiros were doing this for Newton Villages blog; TAB sometimes covers this]
- Sponsor a cable show profiling local businesses
- Outreach and conversations with local businesses and business owners
- Improve Newton's bio-tech status (currently bronze)
- Develop a strategy (including necessary permitting, zoning, regulatory changes) to pursue life sciences
- Develop a strategy (including necessary permitting, zoning, regulatory changes) to pursue a green energy business cluster
- Village nightlife strategies
- Business quick-response team (as suggested by EDSAT)
- Formal collaboration with Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce
- Identify challenges/roadblocks/deal-breakers to small businesses in Newton
- Advertising and marketing of the City, local restaurants and businesses; branding as business-friendly

- Civic Spaces project in vacant windows or public space in a village
(<http://civiccenter.cc/i-wish-this-was/>)
- Strategies to help fill vacancies [related: non-profits and organizations seek help locating in Newton]
- Strategies to help retain existing businesses [e.g. Newtonville Books]
- De-brief process with businesses that left Newton [e.g. EDC moved to Waltham] and new businesses
- Incubator for new business [i.e. EDSAT question: Is there an incubator or other form of cooperative and supportive space for start-up businesses?]
- Shared-work space for those who work from home [<http://workbarboston.com/> near South Station or <http://www.studiocrossings.com/> in Waltham]
- Venture Capital Forum – Workshop with small businesses to meet with advisors, venture capital investors [Gov. Patrick VC Small Business fund? small businesses don't have time, money, knowledge to do this and there is potential in Newton to meet VC/investors/advisors]
- Partner with Massachusetts Small Business Development Center at UMass Boston
(<http://www.sbdc.umb.edu/>)
- Small business workshops [note: Women's Enterprise Initiative fills part of this niche] [note: City of Cambridge hosts small business workshops Wednesday mornings:
http://www2.cambridgema.gov/cdd/ed/smbus/ed_workshops.html]
- Micro-grant program for façade improvements, wayfinding, etc. [Amanda has economic developments funds and is working on this idea]
- Celebrate what is successful!